

# 2

SHEER  
WANT OF  
SPACE

Museum  
Buildings





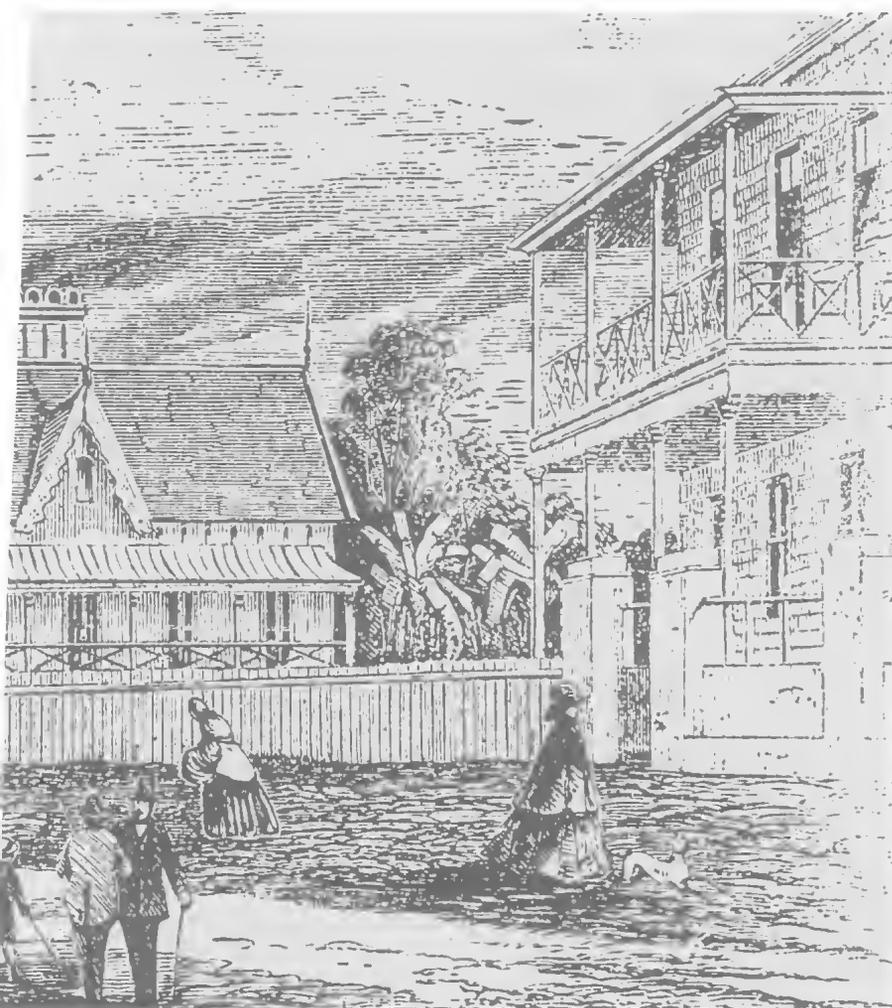
Through the 125 years of its history, from 1862 to 1986, the Queensland Museum has had many homes. Only twice — once in 1879 and now, in 1986 — have buildings been designed and built specifically for it. Perhaps the institution's drive and vitality grew from the efforts and personal commitments that were needed to make its second-hand accommodation functional. Despite inconveniences caused by a sometimes critical unsuitability for museum purposes the buildings reflect the development of Brisbane from a convict settlement to the large modern city that it is today.

### The Windmill

The first housing for the fledgling Queensland Museum, triumphantly announced by the *Moreton Bay Courier* in January 1862, was a 'large room..... in the Windmill'<sup>1</sup>. In December 1862 the Philosophical Society, in its first report, refers to the 'temporary' space granted to it by the government for the 'nucleus of a museum of natural science' in the 'Windmill Tower'. It was modest accommodation indeed.

The Windmill still stands, high on Wickham Terrace, overlooking the city in which it is the oldest surviving building and now one of only two that remain from the penal settlement, the other being the Commissariat

*Previous page:* The Exhibition building.

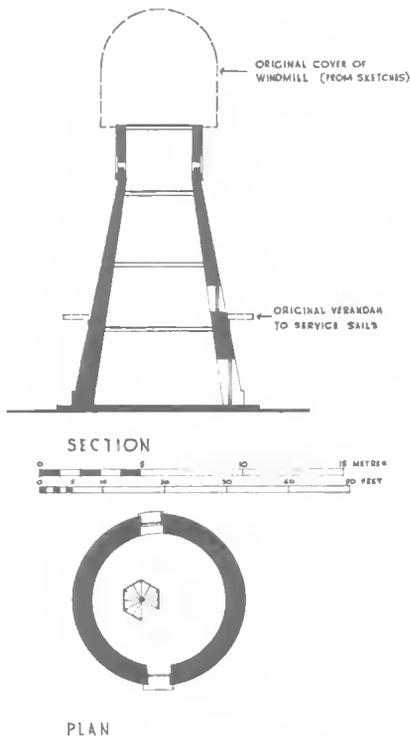


The Windmill, 1865. It was already operating as a telegraph and signal station and the Philosophical Society's museum had been installed there from 1862 (wood engraving first published in the Australian Journal 1868. By courtesy John Oxley Library).

Store. It was built between 1827 and 1828 under Commandant Logan to grind the colony's corn and wheat<sup>2,3</sup>. Because of inadequate maintenance and repair it did not perform properly under the prevailing winds and often it was out of service altogether. Therefore a treadmill to be worked by convicts was erected beside it. The treadmill could accommodate up to 25 convicts at one time, but was operated by as few as six when used as punishment<sup>2</sup>. However, as there was no resident millwright in Brisbane, things often went wrong, and then it was necessary to send to Sydney for a convict millwright to carry out repairs. This could take several weeks as the sea journey each way took from six to eight days under favourable sailing conditions. In 1835 the windmill completely broke down. Some months later —

On the 20th February 1836 lightning struck the upper most arm of the Windmill, shattering to pieces the sweep and backstock, and entering the Tower by the opening for the windshaft, in its descent struck the spur wheel tearing away all the brackets, bursting 2 arms and one of the quarters of the wheel and descending onto the platform floor, broke the Treadmill hopper to pieces and bursting open all doors that way escaped<sup>3</sup>.

Such severe damage was not repaired for a long time. It was May 1837 before both the windmill and treadmill were working again. Later



PLAN  
The Windmill—architectural drawings (redrawn from dimensions in Steele, 1975 ?).

that year the newly appointed foreman of works in the penal settlement, Andrew Petrie, arrived from Sydney and discovered that the machinery had never been properly assembled. That was probably the reason for it being in continual need of repair<sup>2</sup>.

The windmill appears to have become derelict between 1841 and 1849 and was advertised for sale—for removal. However, then, as now, there were people who wanted to preserve their city's landmarks. The *Moreton Bay Courier* observed on 8 December 1848 that—

we are glad to learn that an effort is to be made to secure this building for the public. It would be a great pity to destroy a structure which.....adds so much to the picturesque beauty of the town.

Later, on 5 January 1850, under the headline 'Another Appeal for the Old Windmill', that same newspaper in 'advocating its preservation' quotes 'for cursed is he that removeth his neighbour's landmark'<sup>3</sup>. Apparently the government retained possession and it was not pulled down. In 1855 there is a suggestion that the tower be a signal station and in October 1861 its conversion for use as a telegraph as well as signal station was complete<sup>3</sup>. The conversion was planned by colonial architect Charles Tiffin, a prominent member of the Philosophical Society. Tiffin submitted his estimates to the principal under secretary on 20 February 1861 for—

removal of old arms, wheels, top and other ponderous timbers inside, laying floors on each storey, putting in new doors and windows and a new weatherproof floor on top with iron railing, a new staircase or ladder from bottom to top, repairing the stone and brickwork and plastering, building two brick rooms for keeper 12 feet by 12 feet each with water closet and fencing a small triangular plot of ground to make the whole complete<sup>3</sup>.

So when the Philosophical Society's museum was set up in its large room in the windmill tower, it was a fully operational signal and telegraph station—signalling arrivals of steamers and sailing vessels, from Sydney, northern ports and other colonies, strangers from British or foreign ports, warships, ships with English mail or with immigrants on board, schooner, brig or barque<sup>3</sup>. A time ball was hoisted each day at five minutes to 1.00 pm and dropped precisely on the hour—by which clocks in the colony could be set right, for there was no observatory in Brisbane at the time. Telegraph signals were transmitted to and from Sydney.

### The Parliamentary Building

For a while the windmill accommodation was adequate, but at the December 1866 meeting of the Philosophical Society an occurrence was reported that was to be repeated many times in the museum's history—'the cases in the Windmill have suffered considerably during the late heavy rains'<sup>4</sup>. So in October 1868 the society was given the room formerly occupied by the parliamentary library in the Parliamentary building in Queen Street. In January 1869 it was moved to a smaller room in the same building—so small that most of the specimens remained in their boxes.

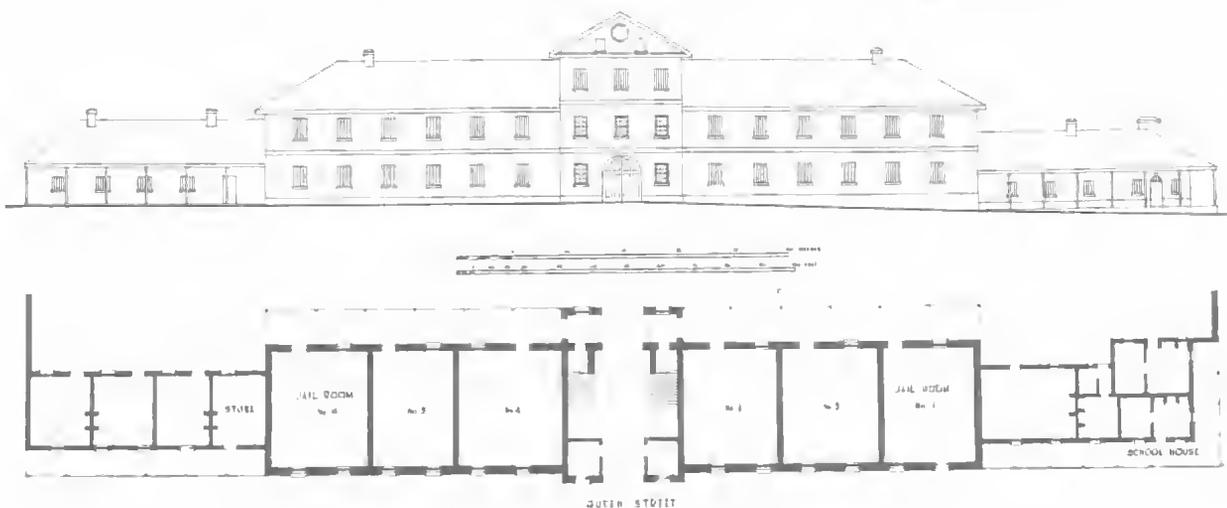
In June 1869 the parliament had resolved that a sum of £300 be set aside 'to initiate the formation of a Free Library and Museum in Brisbane'<sup>5</sup> and there seemed every possibility that there would be a new building. However, the government was persuaded that a mineralogical museum would boost the mining boom—then showing signs of slowing down, and in 1870 only £100 was set aside solely for a mineralogical museum<sup>5</sup>. Former government geologist, C. D'Oyly Aplin, noting the £100 that was available, wrote to the minister on 1 June 1871 suggesting that rooms be made available in the Parliamentary building for a mineralogical

museum, and offering his services<sup>6</sup>. So, that same month a second room was found in which D'Oyly Aplin arranged the mineralogical specimens — those that he had collected as well as those collected by the other government geologist, Daintree, that had been held by the Philosophical Society. The two small rooms in the Parliamentary building that Karl Staiger refers to as containing the museum when he was appointed custodian in 1873 were the one containing the minerals and the other the zoological specimens<sup>7</sup>. Although, in April 1871, Coxen, Diggles and Bancroft — prominent members of the Philosophical Society — had again raised the need for a museum building with the minister for Public Works, who had appeared to favour the idea, the government appears to have forgotten all about the proposal for the time being.

The Parliamentary building, located on the north-western side of Queen Street from the present corner of Albert Street towards George Street, had been erected as a convict barracks in 1826–1829<sup>8</sup>. In 1839 part of it was used as a police court — the first in Queensland. Much later, in May 1857, the Supreme Court was also accommodated in the building. In 1860 part was converted to provide a temporary home for the first Queensland houses of parliament<sup>9</sup>. They moved to their new building at the end of George Street in 1868, just before the museum moved down from the Windmill. However, parliamentary messengers and the clerk of the Legislative Assembly stayed in the old Parliamentary building until about 1879<sup>9</sup>. In that year — 1879 — the Supreme Court moved to its new location and the old building was demolished soon after, in 1881. There are no available records of the alterations carried out to adapt it to its changing uses, although the original plan is preserved.

For the museum, the move from the Windmill to premises in a conspicuous and central location was advantageous, for here it became a well established part of the life of the community. Indeed, the building itself was particularly conspicuous for when Brisbane had become a free settlement in 1859 the surveyors had submitted various plans for the town to Governor Gipps in Sydney. In all plans Queen Street was to be the main street and about one and one half chains (20 metres) in width, the remaining streets to be one chain wide. Governor Gipps rejected this plan and ordered all streets to be one chain wide. His statement was 'Oh! the idea of wasting such a lot of land for a street in a place that will be nothing

The Barracks building, subsequently the Parliamentary building. The museum was moved to a room here in 1869. Between 1871 and 1873 it occupied two of the rooms (redrawn from archival drawings in Steele, 1975<sup>2</sup>).



else but a paltry village'<sup>2</sup>. Subsequently, Queen Street was made the originally specified width by moving back the north-western side of the street, leaving the old convict barracks building projecting into the street.

Although the building was central and accessible as well as being familiar and conspicuous, the space in it occupied by the museum was far too small<sup>7</sup>. On 26 July 1872 Coxen wrote to the secretary for Works directing his attention to the museum's needs:

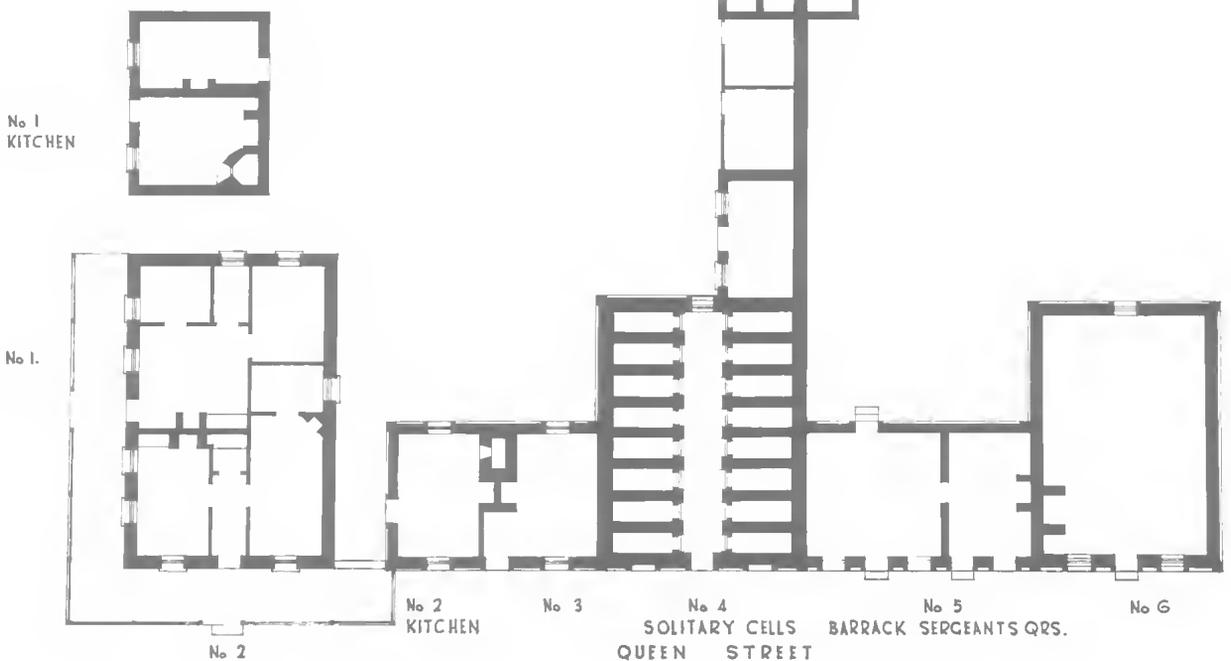
the pressing desirability for providing more suitable accommodation and space than now exists<sup>10</sup>.

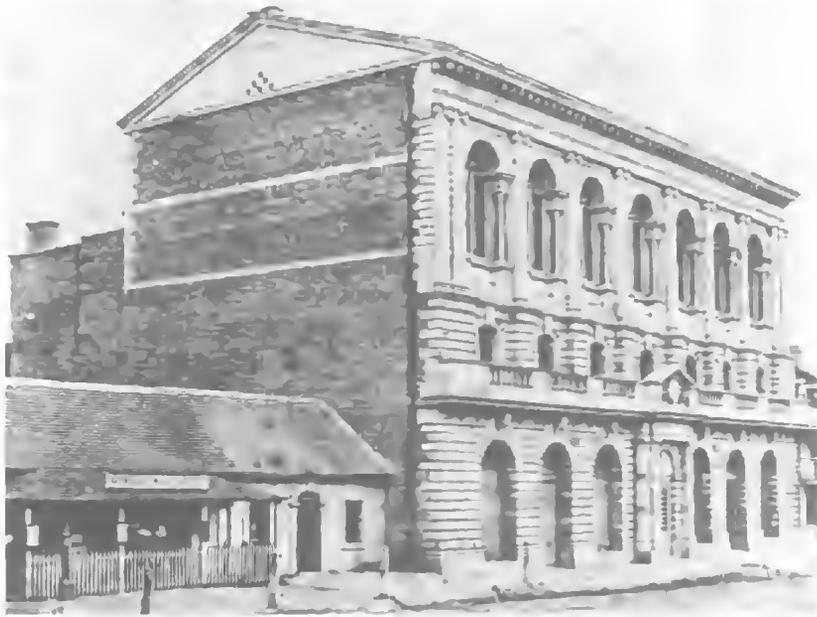
Written in the margin of that letter is the minister's response:

Inform Mr Coxen that the colonial architect has orders to prepare plans of a museum with a view to immediate steps being taken to build one<sup>10</sup>.

F.D.G. Stanley, the colonial architect, recommended that the Servants Home in Ann Street — which is today the restored School of Arts building — be purchased and altered to provide a home for the museum. He estimated that £246 would be needed for the alterations but £30 could be saved if the upper floor was left unfinished<sup>11</sup>. This plan was soon abandoned. Meanwhile a third temporary home had been found for the museum — further up Queen Street, in the accommodation vacated by the General Post Office, when, in 1873, it moved to its present location at the other end of the same street. Planning for a new museum building was again deferred.

Apartment 3 of this building became the Post Office and, in 1873, the museum. The additional space the museum subsequently acquired in this building included the Long Room — but it is not known which room this was (redrawn from archival drawings in Steele, 1975<sup>2</sup>).





The General Post Office and the new Brisbane City Hall about 1864. The museum moved into the Post Office building in 1873. The arched doorway to the right of the Post Office was the entrance to the solitary cells in the days of the convict settlement (photograph by courtesy Oxley Library).

### The Post Office Building

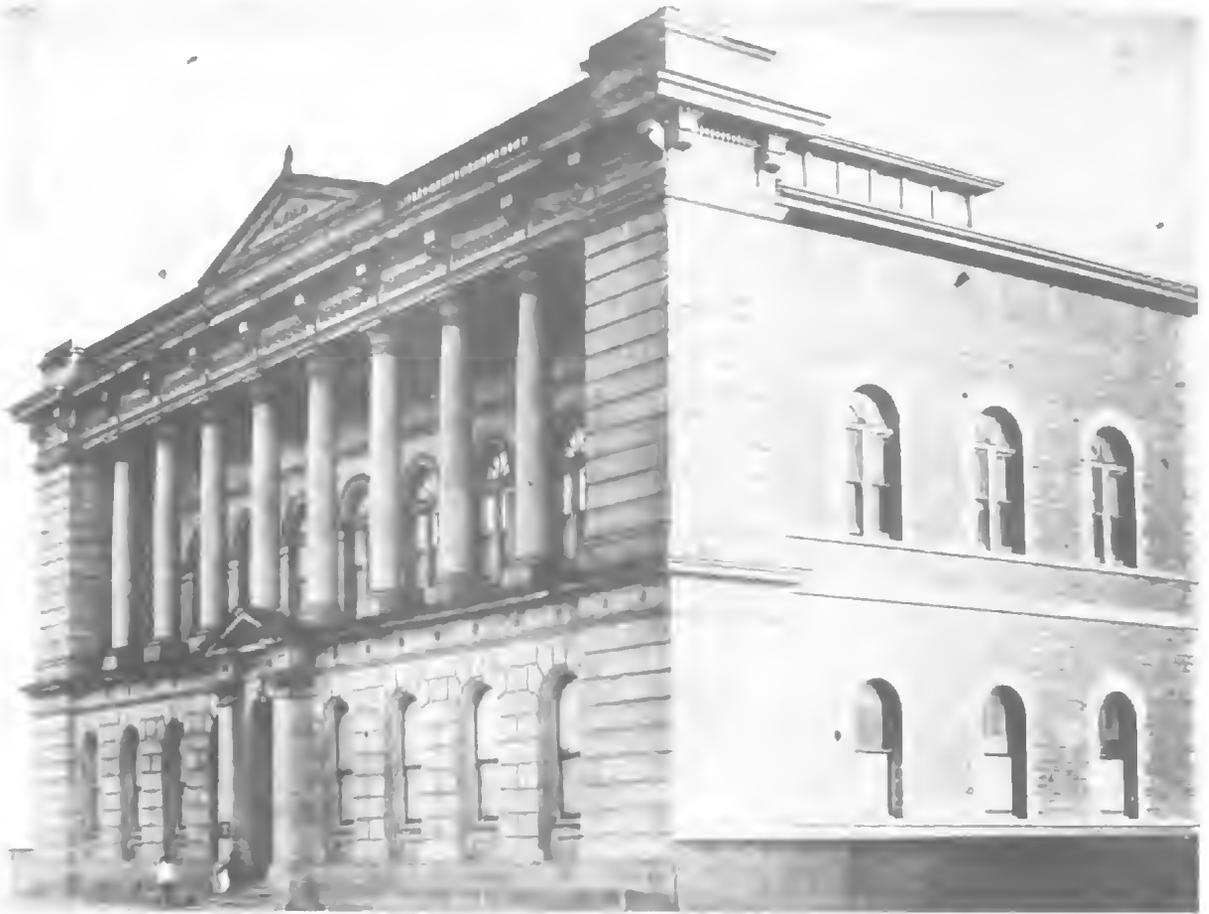
The building, standing between the site now occupied by Lennons Hotel and George Street, had originally consisted of six apartments, comprising barracks and sergeants quarters (Apartments 5, 6), solitary cells (Apartment 4) and a house for the superintendent of convicts. In 1839, a free-man, William Whyte, in charge of the records in the commandant's office and described as the commandant's clerk and postmaster, moved into apartment 2 which became the Post Office. In 1864 a verandah was added to apartment 3 and to the kitchen of apartment 2 and both these rooms were combined to provide space for the General Post Office. Apartments 5 and 6, which were where that part of Lennons Hotel nearest George Street now stands, were demolished for construction of the Brisbane Town Hall which was completed in 1864<sup>8</sup>.

In 1873 Staiger obtained rooms for an office and laboratory and a larger one for a mineral display<sup>7</sup> and the next month asked for, and received, additional space — the Long Room in the building<sup>12</sup>. However, it was not long before it was recognised that the old Post Office building was not an ideal home for a museum. Early in 1875, only two years after it had moved in, A.C. Gregory, the Queensland government surveyor and distinguished explorer reported to the secretary of Public Works:

The museum is at present located in the Old General Post Office, the entrance being by a narrow passage from Queen Street. The specimens.....are contained in a wooden building 20 feet by 72 feet..... The laboratory is 19 feet x 21 feet, badly lighted and imperfectly ventilated. The lecture room is 15 feet x 26 feet and an office and store room for arrangement of specimens is about 18 feet x 24 feet, giving a total floor space of 1216 sq feet. These buildings.....are unadapted to the purpose of the museum and there is no available space for additions<sup>13</sup>.

Gregory recommended its sale, the land being of great value for commercial premises, to realise —

a sum equal to the cost of building suitable premises in a better position, for the main street of a city is not suited for such a purpose, not only on account of the dust, but also (because) the class of



Built in 1879, this was the first building constructed for the museum, which occupied it until 1899. After the museum moved to Gregory Terrace this building became the State Library (photograph by courtesy Oxley Library).

persons who visit Museums prefer a more quiet approach and space where carriages can stand without risk of disturbances.

Further, Gregory thought it was —

not desirable that laboratory experiments and assays of minerals should be conducted in a densely occupied locality.

Gregory's idea of a museum was that it would have space not only for a building to contain specimens of minerals and natural history but also for a laboratory with a small crushing machine and other machinery (including furnaces) for the assay of metallic ores. The only three portions of land in the hands of the government that appeared to him to be suitable for this purpose were at the corner of George and Ann Streets on a site occupied by the Volunteer Drill Room; vacant land at the corner of George and Turbot Streets; and the irregular portion of land bounded by Roma Street, Saul Street, and a street unnamed. The site he most strongly recommended for a museum was the Brisbane Grammar School — since it had been suggested that the school be removed following resumption of some of its land for the Roma Street Station. In fact, his letter contains details of the ways that the school buildings could be adapted to accommodate the museum.

In 1876 the Queensland government gave, as the first task for the museum's new board of trustees, the job of deciding on the site (see Chapter 14). While these negotiations went on, the board sought temporary accommodation into which the museum could expand. In June 1876 the

trustees acquired the detectives' room in the Post Office building, but their efforts, in July 1876, to have the hospital dispensary moved were not so successful. Therefore, when, on 6 February 1877, they were offered the use of the railway messengers' waiting room at the Brisbane Station for museum storage, the trustees saw a solution. On 29 May 1877 they wrote to the minister —

strongly representing that the hospital dispensary should be removed to the (Railway) messengers quarters and the two rooms at present used for the former purpose be placed at the disposal of (the) Board, attention being drawn to the desirability of this course, particularly with regard to the injury caused to the museum by the presence of so many Hospital patients and also the risk of fire caused by the explosive materials.....being stored on the premises by the hospital authorities<sup>14</sup>.

On 18 July 1877 the hospital dispensary at last vacated its two rooms in the Post Office building which the custodian hoped then to be able to use for the geological and mineralogical collections<sup>15</sup>.

### The First New Museum Building

The site that was eventually chosen for the first purpose-built Queensland Museum was in William Street. The building was completed in 1879 and cost £10,706. It still stands — as the State Library and John Oxley Library. The building was designed in the Colonial Architect's Department under the supervision of the colonial architect, F.D.G. Stanley. The building has concrete foundations, front walls of stone, the remainder of brick finished with stucco, with a roof of copper. There was a basement with a large room in which the board met and which was used for a library; the curator's office — in which the Philosophical Society met from 20 April 1881 until de Vis was appointed curator in 1882; and a taxidermist's room. The main entrance floor and an upper floor with a mezzanine floor, 13 feet (4 metres) wide, were used for displays. Additional space was created on 16 February 1881 when the rest of the area beneath the building was levelled for use as storage for specimens and other materials, although the floor was asphalted only in June 1882. In October 1882 the basement was lit by gas. It was all a very great



The ground floor of the State Library in 1930. Apart from the mezzanine floor which was added after the museum moved out 30 years before, it is much as it was when it was the museum. The internal stairs to the basement can be seen beneath the mezzanine — behind the reception desk; the front entrance is to the right of the photograph and the stairs to the first floor are in the upper right corner (photograph by courtesy Oxley Library).

improvement on the previous accommodation available to the museum, which had vastly expanded its collections.

However, before long, as a result of the collecting programmes that started from 1882, even this building proved to be too small, and in 1884 the government set aside a sum of £40,000 for another new building. In a debate in the Legislative Assembly following this decision a Mr Morehead voiced a widely held view of the William Street building in terms that would do justice to some parliamentary debates today:

a more wretched abortion of a building was never evolved, even from the brain of a Stanley.....He (Mr Morehead) was glad to hear that something was to be done towards getting a new museum building and he hoped some hon. members.....would be preserved in it<sup>16</sup>.

Mr Archer, in the same debate, suggested that 'he thought a museum building should be on such a plan that it could be extended every ten or twelve years'<sup>16</sup>. Eventually tenders were called for a new building in 1890 but none were accepted and the idea appears to have been dropped. The depression occurred soon after, in 1893, and by the time it was over an alternative had been found.

In 1895 the National Agricultural and Industrial Association of Queensland (NAIAQ) was in financial difficulties and could not service the loan it had obtained for the construction of its new Exhibition building. Accordingly in 1897 the government took over the building and plans were put in hand to convert part of it for use as a museum<sup>17</sup>.

The Exhibition building from the air, 1981.



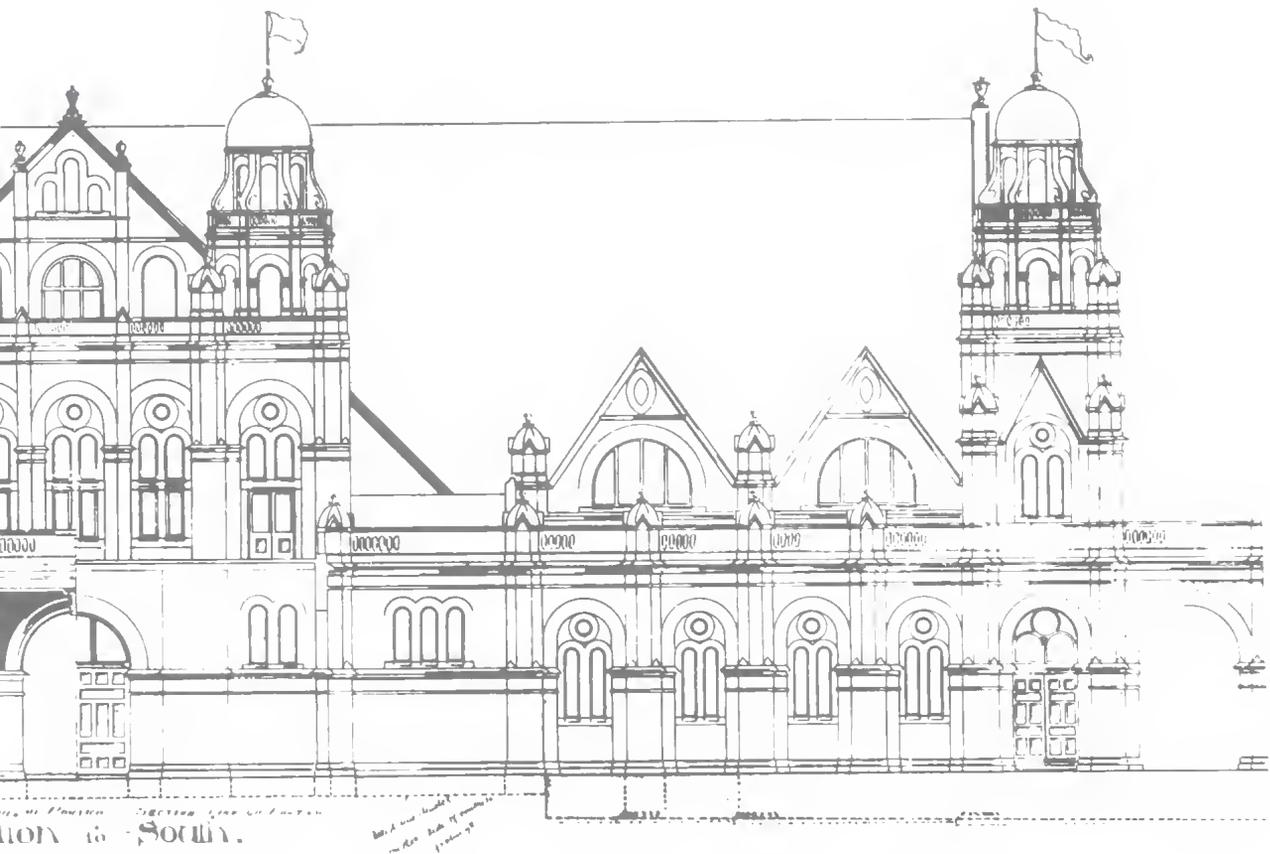
Exhibition building, elevation to south (original architectural drawing in the Works Department)

## The Exhibition Building

The building, which was to be home for the Queensland Museum for 86 years, is an impressive blend of Romanesque, Byzantine and Baroque influences in polychromatic brick work in a style generally known as 'Victorian Revival' architecture. At the time it was built it was unique in Brisbane and it is one of the few examples of its style to be found in Queensland. It is a well-known and much-loved landmark, now listed by the National Trust of Queensland and the Australian Heritage Commission as part of the National Estate.

It was built after the original timber exhibition building of the NAIQA (later the Royal National Association) was destroyed by fire—an act of arson said to have been perpetrated by a lessee who used it for a skating rink<sup>17</sup>. The NAIQA decided to erect a more permanent structure and engaged G.H.M. Addison to design a building on a 17 acre (6.8 hectares) site in Bowen Park that was leased from the Acclimatisation Society<sup>18</sup>.

A contract was signed, on 9 February 1891, with the builder, John Quinn, at an estimated cost of £20,400. This figure was to rise to over £30,000 on completion. The contract time was 12 months, but the northern wing was ready for occupation within 23 weeks. The roofing iron left England in March and was in place by the 23 June 1891. Some 1.6 million locally made bricks from the Brick Manufacturing Association were used. The joinery was made on site where four steam engines were used to power the milling machines. When the brickwork was being done there were up to 300 men of all trades at work at one time<sup>19</sup>.



At the time the Exhibition building was under construction Queensland was in the grip of a severe economic depression and several hundred tradesmen and labourers would queue outside the site gates every morning in the hope of gaining employment. J.B. Chapel relates how his father, a bricklayer, would leave home with his tool bag over his shoulder at 4 am each day to walk from Greenslopes to the site so as to be near the front of the queue<sup>20</sup>.

The architect, George Henry Male Addison, born in Llanely, Wales in 1857 or '58, a graduate of the Royal Academy School of Architecture in London, had come to Australia in 1883 soon after graduating. By 1886, when he first came to Brisbane to work on the London Chartered Bank building, he was a partner in the Melbourne firm of Terry, Oakden and Addison<sup>21</sup>. Presumably it was during this project that he made the contacts that resulted in his appointment as architect for the Exhibition building; and subsequently resulted in his move to Brisbane. His other buildings include Somerville House School, The Mansions in George Street and the Albert Street Methodist Church.

In 1891, the year the Exhibition building was completed, the Crystal Palace in London (also constructed speedily—in nine months) was then 40 years old, the Melbourne Exhibition building was 11 years old and the Royal Pavilion at Brighton nearly 70 years old. These all reflected the fashion for flamboyant exhibition buildings and the Brisbane Exhibition building was no exception. However, it was not only exhibition buildings that influenced Addison's design—although it was built for a social function, the Brisbane Exhibition building, externally, is reminiscent of a cathedral.

In a florid lecture delivered before the Queensland Art Society, the architect revealed his concept of the importance of architecture:

The Exhibition building, probably taken at the time of the 1897 International Exhibition, the year of Queen Victoria's Jubilee—celebrated in the banner hanging over the front entrance in this photograph.



.....the embodiment of noble aspirations in the monuments of one generation helps to keep those aspirations alive in the next.....and if we are to continue to be a race capable of higher aims than accumulating money and eating good dinners, we cannot afford to ignore any of the agencies which help to develop man's higher ethical nature. Amongst the most potent of these agencies are Architecture and decorative Arts<sup>22</sup>.

Addison believed that every civilisation contributed its own characteristic elements to architecture, each 'an exact index to the national character that produced them'; and he believed in using these elements — drawing on the old with the aim of reassembling it anew. If he liked a feature and it could be of use, then he would fit it into the design.

In the Gregory Terrace building Addison combined many known styles of architecture and added other exotic motifs to enhance the facade. The decorative polychromatic brickwork and polygonal domes on the towers are Byzantine; there are Moorish tiles on the portico; the arches on the northern aspect are Romanesque and enclose decorative roundels; there are traces of medieval towers and turrets in the southern — concert hall — entrance; in the flat western facade there is a great Gothic cathedral-style window that contrasts with the towers, turrets, dormers, gable roofs and recessed arches of the other aspects of the building; and the roof is corrugated iron. Constructive features aid the ornamentation<sup>19</sup>. For instance the turrets contain internal staircases that once led to concert balconies and the roundels outlined in decorative brickwork sometimes contain a dormer window for extra light. However, although the facade is elaborate and fanciful, it covers a very simple and plain building.

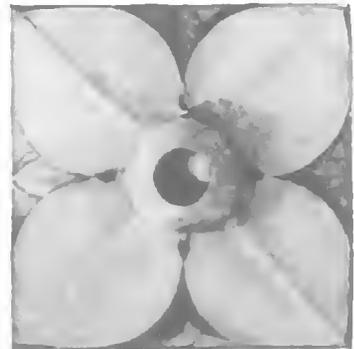
In England some buildings of the late Victorian era — Victoria Station, the Imperial War Museum in Lambeth, Westminster Cathedral and Keeble College in Oxford — illustrate the fact that Addison was not unique in collecting many styles under one roof — or dome<sup>23</sup>. Eclecticism has really always existed as architects from the Romans to the 20th century have transferred remembered forms to new contexts. In the Exhibition building as in many late Victorian buildings, invention was stimulated by the great variety of forms from which to choose.

### A Museum, A Concert Hall, An Art Gallery

The Exhibition building is T-shaped in plan. The northern wing (the top of the T) was originally one open, single-storied exhibition hall with a balcony at the eastern end and exposed steel Fink trusses supporting the steeply pitched corrugated iron roof<sup>24</sup>. Arches led from this hall into the southern leg of the T which again was open and single storied — a concert hall with balconies on three sides.

In 1892 the NAIQA had installed, in the concert hall, a large four-manual organ from Henry Willis and Sons, London. In 1900 the Brisbane City Council leased the concert hall from the state government, and bought the organ — £1000 of the £6000 purchase price being raised by public subscription. Thus, the function of the concert hall did not change from that intended by the NAIQA when it was built<sup>25</sup>. It was used for many functions. Paderewski gave recitals there and so did Dame Nellie Melba. It was also used for University of Queensland graduation ceremonies<sup>26</sup>.

When the new Brisbane City Hall was completed in 1930 the City Council moved out of the Exhibition building, and the concert hall became the home for the Queensland Art Gallery. Changes that were made to the concert hall in 1930 to accommodate the art gallery included the removal



Addison's design for the terracotta tiles over the front entrance to the concert hall in the Exhibition building (original architectural drawing in the Works Department).



Demolition of the caretaker's cottage near the railway line, 1973. The site was used later as a car park.

of the concert platform and the jacking of the sloping floor up to a level surface. The balconies were cut back and boxed in to cover the tiered seating, platforms and partitions were erected to form offices and store rooms and, again, staircases were altered. Clear storey lights were installed in the roof. At some stage, possibly in the 1940s, a hessian ceiling was suspended by wires over the exhibition space. In the late 1950s new doorways were provided to the entrance.

It was the northern wing of the building, the exhibition hall, that was converted to house the museum. On 7 May 1898 Director de Vis inspected the building and discussed, with the colonial architect, the alterations that would be required. It was estimated that they would cost £8000 and take 18 months to complete. The museum moved in between October and the end of December 1899 and by that time the alterations had, indeed, been completed. Arches between the two halls of the building were bricked up and staircases had been altered. A first or mezzanine floor with three large light wells had been added, leading off the eastern balcony. This floor was supported on fluted columns of local hardwood with cornices and panelled dados. The mezzanine and ground floor were to house the displays and the basement of the building had been converted into offices for the museum staff. A caretaker's cottage had been built in the grounds. The specifications for the work included extensive repairs to brickwork and the replacement of cracked lintels<sup>27</sup> — for, despite its much admired ornate exterior, the enthusiasm and excessive haste of its construction, along with the lack of foresight in detailing was the cause of major maintenance problems from the beginning. At the board of trustees meeting on 26 May 1900 attention was called —

to the want of drinking water in the building.....Dr Marks recommended.....the purchase of a Pasteur filter and the curator was authorised to procure one.....The need of a urinal for the use of the staff was also pointed out.

The trustees eventually left the matter in de Vis' hands. He intended to divert a waste water pipe from the laboratory sinks to the urinal, suggesting that chemical wastes and a constant flow of water 'would alleviate any nuisance' — the trustees being worried about the odours generated by a urinal. There is no further discussion of these problems

recorded in the board minutes and de Vis undoubtedly made some arrangements. However, 10 years later Robert Etheridge jnr, curator of the Australian Museum, was to describe them:

in a dark corner of the basement are some dirty hand basin(s) and contiguous to them an unenclosed urinal-basin<sup>28</sup>.

There was no proper lavatory in the basement. Upstairs on the ground floor were the earth closets for the use of visitors to the galleries. The area was not sewered until 1927 and the museum was connected to the sewerage only in 1930.

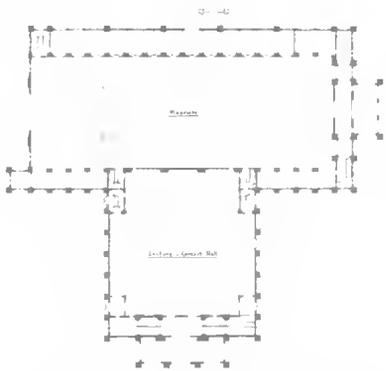
There was no love lost between the museum trustees and the original lessees of the concert hall—the City Council. For one thing, the trustees had wanted the concert hall for extra space for the museum. There was also an extra insurance premium to be paid because the concert hall was hired out for public functions; and, since the gas engine to operate the organ was in the basement of the museum, the organ blower needed access at difficult hours<sup>29</sup>. In their annual report of 1902, the museum trustees refer to their neighbour in the Exhibition building:



Looking across the fields from the museum to the Brisbane General Hospital about 1920.



This much admired bushhouse, photographed in 1906, was the work of John Jordan, curator of the museum gardens from 1897 to 1929 (Chapter 3<sup>33</sup>). Visitors could enter the museum through the bushhouse and the eastern verandah and so avoid the tell-tale at the front entrance to the gallery (photograph by courtesy Oxley Library).



Architectural drawings of the Exhibition building showing alterations made for the museum (redrawn from Works Department drawings in Queensland State Archives).

The erection of a Town hall in which to put their organ seems to be indefinitely postponed. Meanwhile we are compelled to pay thrice the ordinary premium for insurance against fire in consequence of the concert hall being held to be in dangerous contact with the museum.

At the board meeting of 31 March 1900 the trustees had decided that the Department of Agriculture — from which the City Council leased the concert hall — should pay the museum’s extra insurance premium. They reasoned that the department profited from the use that was made of the concert hall. Of course the department refused. So in November the board refused to pay a share of the rates. However, on 26 April 1902, its budget halved as a result of the depression of the 1890s, the board had to stop insuring the collections altogether and it finally agreed to contribute to the rates.

### A Fire Trap and a Joke

When the museum moved into the Exhibition building at the end of 1899 it had more space than ever before. However, the collections continued their astonishing growth, and despite the alterations, the building was never altogether satisfactory for a museum. The annual report of the trustees for 1899 had predicted the problem of a shortage of space right from the beginning — when they had not been successful in getting the concert hall as well as the exhibition hall<sup>30</sup>.

In 1933 a Mr S.F. Markham, honorary secretary of the Museums’ Association of Great Britain, visited Brisbane on behalf of the Carnegie Corporation of New York. He inspected the museum with Professor Richards of the University of Queensland and they reported that the risk of fire in the building was too high to be allowed to continue<sup>31</sup>. Almost a year later Markham’s report, in which he referred to the museum building as a fire trap, and a joke because it was so unsuitable, was released in London. The Brisbane press was aghast that it should have been the cause of such derision<sup>32</sup>. However the state was still in the grips of the great depression and although the situation was deplored, the *Courier Mail* editorial echoed what appeared to be the government’s view — that too many people took money out of Queensland instead of using it to endow institutions such as the museum. Premier Forgan Smith said that his government would welcome a new museum building, but should not bear its whole cost<sup>32</sup>. So the old one continued to age and deteriorate.



Attendants mopping up storm water in the main gallery in the 1960s.

In the late 1960s portions of the porch over the art gallery entrance collapsed, and the leaking roof was causing damage to the collections of both the museum and art gallery. At some expense the whole building was re-roofed and the brickwork repaired. Unfortunately, the many box gutters were repaired rather than replaced and the building continued to leak in an unpredictable manner, particularly during hailstorms when the gutters rapidly clogged with ice<sup>33</sup>. Rain, with its consequent risk of water damage to the collections, was an ever-present fear, especially in the savage storms of the summer months. Cyclonic storms provided several anxious moments during the 1970s. One storm lifted the whole northern roof to the extent that the roof purlins came off the fixing cleats. On another occasion the large stained glass western window shook and threatened to collapse as rain and wind battered it incessantly. Fortunately, apart from an incident in 1917 when a projection lantern was knocked down in the bird display, there were never any fires.



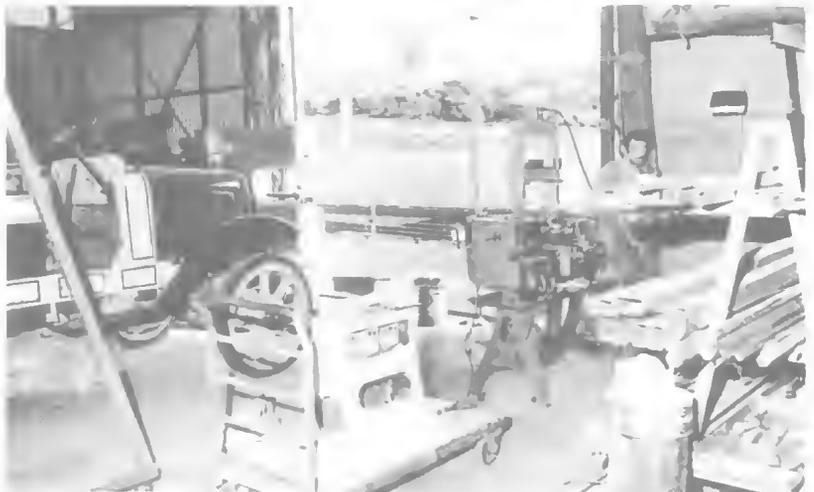
Cramped accommodation, Queensland Museum 1982. The sections of molluscs and mammalogy shared one internal room, partially divided down the centre with shelving. The entrance to the shell collection is shown behind Curator J. Stanisic's desk.

With the promulgation of the *Queensland Museum Act 1970*, the new museum board was required to take over, from the government, responsibility for the museum's insurance. Similarly the art gallery was responsible for its own insurance. To satisfy their separate insurers, a brick fire wall was built between the museum and the art gallery. The museum installed a sensitive smoke detection system and moved the spirit store from the centre of the basement to a new fire resistant building in the grounds. At last there had been some response to Markham's criticisms of 1933.

In 1973 a large outbreak of termite infestation was discovered. Sporadic infestations had been recorded over the years. There is an account from Dibbs and Co. dating from the late 1890s referring to treatment for white ant<sup>27</sup>. In more recent years five different species of termite have been found to be active in the building, the most troublesome being the introduced West Indian termite *Cryptotermes brevis*. However, the large holes in some of the hoop pine structural members that workmen thought were signs of an infestation of giant borers in the



Artificer's shed, Queensland Museum, 1982.



A corner of the metals workshop, Queensland Museum, 1982.



In 1974, after the Queensland Art Gallery vacated it, the art and photography sections of the museum occupied the south wing – formerly the concert hall – of the Exhibition building. Here the displays for the new building on the South Bank were prepared.

building were indeed the result of borers, but of marine borers that had invaded the logs as they were originally rafted to sawmills or port facilities in the Maryborough-Fraser Island or Logan river areas.

Investigations in 1973 resulted in the closure of the art gallery due to concern over the stability of the concert hall section of the building and continuing leaking during heavy rain. Roof trusses of hoop pine which were over-stressed to nearly 7 mPa in full section, had been eaten out by up to 10% of the section and some areas—fortunately under minor stress—had been eaten out completely. The roof trusses were repaired with steel cord stiffeners and tie rods and, in 1974, the museum expanded into the space vacated by the art gallery<sup>13</sup>. It was used as work areas for the art, photography and geology sections of the museum and this alleviated the pressures elsewhere.

However, more and more adjustments had to be made to a building that was urgently in need of restoration and that was required to house a staff that had grown from four persons when it first occupied the building, to 25 in 1970, and that was to grow to 75 in 1980. More space was needed for staff accommodation, workshops and laboratories, storage for the growing collection and more and better display facilities to satisfy a more sophisticated public that was used to the visual impact of modern television presentations.

A large galvanised iron shed was used to house part of the technology collection and the workshop. Later, prefabricated buildings were set up in the grounds to house the conservation laboratory, preparators, artificers, education and maritime archaeology sections and the administration staff. In the main building, the earth-floored basements were sealed with concrete—although they continued to be referred to, affectionately, as the earth basements—to create storage areas for the ever-growing history, technology, and geology collections; and the five species of termite, thus disturbed from their usual routes, made new and alarming appearances. Every summer, storms created acute risk of water damage to valuable collection items. Damp walls creating high humidity were frequent hazards and required constant vigilance and enterprise on the part of curators—especially those responsible for anthropology and Australian ethnography collections that were housed along the outer walls.

### **A Museum worthy of the City and the State**

The board of trustees, as one of its first tasks following its re-establishment in 1970, had begun to urge the state government to make provisions for adequate housing for its museum, and to consider sites for a new building (see Chapter 14). Eventually, it was the state government's decision to develop, on the south bank of the Brisbane River, a cultural complex that would include the museum, theatres and the state library, as well as the art gallery. The new museum building was stage 3 of this project.

Robin Gibson of Brisbane was the architect chosen for the Cultural Centre. The white concrete buildings, spread along the river bank opposite the main commercial and administrative centre of the city, have brought Brisbane to the forefront of urban architecture. The six climate-controlled levels of the museum building, rising behind the art gallery, include all the facilities needed—facilities that previously have not been available to the museum nor, indeed, to many museum's elsewhere.

There are three display floors comprising 5,000 square metres and an external geological garden. On the upper two stories are offices, laboratories, collection storage areas and the library. On the first floor,



Collection storage in the 'earth basement', Queensland Museum, 1982.

which at its southern end contains lecture theatres and classrooms for the education section, are art and preparatorial sections, photography studios and dark rooms, artificers and metal workshops, aquarium room, live animal room, deep freeze, skeletal and fossil preparation and sorting areas. Architect Robert Wilson has been the consultant to the museum to help plan the fittings it would need in the new building. Solved, at last, is the problem of a refreshment room for visitors that confounded the board of trustees when, on 23 February 1901, it sent a deputation to discuss the matter with the minister. Solved also are the serious conservation problems arising from overcrowding, humidity, variable temperature and rainwater that through the years have challenged the museum's capacity to preserve the material record of the state's history.

The Queensland Museum will assuredly continue its development. Branches to interpret and display aspects of the state's history and to serve the communities in regional centres are now opening, and more are being planned. However, for the foreseeable future, the museum will have as its headquarters and focus of its activities this fine and well-equipped new building, that will help it to execute its wide and diverse responsibilities more effectively than at any other time in its history.





A new building for the museum in the Queensland Cultural Centre. *Left*: under construction, 1982; *below*, nearing completion, 1984 — the museum is in the centre of the picture, the windows of the two upper levels looking north across the roof of the art gallery (*centre foreground*).

